Newsletter of the African Burial Ground & Five Points Archaeological Projects

# UPDATE

Winter 1996-97

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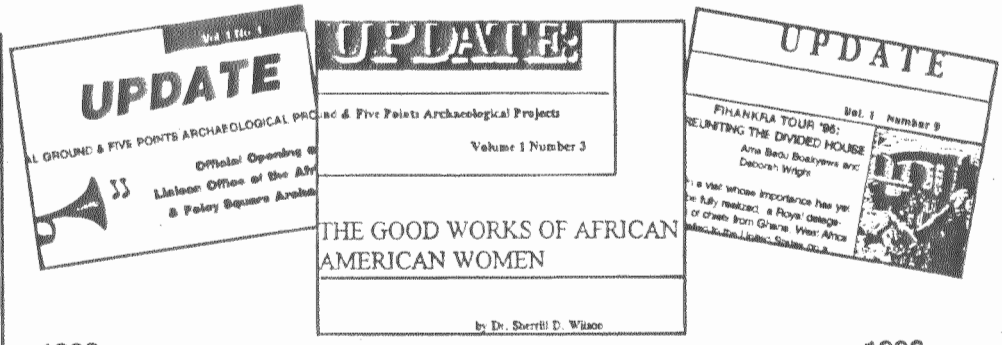
## In This Issue...






1993 1996

## *UPDATING THE WORLD ON THE AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND*

***— Emilyn L. Brown***

This issue of *Update* marks an important milestone in our continuing efforts to address public interest in the African Burial Ground. *Update* first premiered in the Spring of 1993 as a simple 6 page layout with cut and paste graphics. That first issue announced our official opening and focused on the goals of the project along with a feature about the recovered artifacts housed in the Foley Square Laboratory. There was also a chronology detailing the initial recovery phase of the site, and the sequence of events leading to eventual landmark status.

As events continued to unfold the newsletter kept pace, reporting successes as well as setbacks along the way. For example, the enthusiastic send-off that occurred in New York when the remains were transported to Howard University was overshadowed by the disbanding of the Federal Steering Committee. Yet, the site continued to make history. In 1995, a visit by a royal delegation from Ghana culminated in a ceremony of atonement for their nation's past involvement in the slave trade; a recognition that some, whose lives were shattered by this holocaust, were buried at the site.

Elevated to an international symbol of common history and struggle, response to the African Burial Ground has resulted in a readership which currently numbers 10,000. A strong measure of support, this high public interest underscores the effectiveness of "getting the word out" and has generated a number of other OPEI publications -- A History Sampler for Children, a Study Guide and Glossary, Citations and Questions and Answers -- to name a few. In the coming year we hope to keep this momentum high, reporting the scientific progress made at Howard, efforts to memorialize the site and preliminary plans for reinterment of the remains. In extending our heartfelt appreciation for your continued support, we offer our best wishes for the coming year!

***"During Kwanzaa, we reverently retell the stories of contemporaries and ancestors."***

***Dorothy Winbush Riley --- The Complete Kwanzaa (1995).***

# ✈✈✈ LETTERS TO THE EDITOR ✈✈✈

**Archaeological Sites and Regulatory Legislation**

I came upon your address on the web in the interesting and informative publication *African-American Archaeology.* I am in search of a sample of municipal, state, or federal legislation which obligates a jurisdiction to conduct an archaeological dig and prepare a report of the findings, in the event that human bones of, for example, 150 years ago, are discovered during construction or site preparation...I am also very interested in the work that you people are doing, having just heard a bit about the NYC dig via a television documentary. Where, exactly in NYC is the dig, and do you have a brochure or can you direct me to other info about the obstacles you had to overcome before such a dig would be conducted? Often these situations have many parallels.

Diane Taylor Miles
Fredericton, New Brunswick
Canada

*[**Ed. note:** Because of numerous inquiries of this type, we're planning to offer a feature story concerning regula--tory legislation of cemeteries in the very near future.]*

**Chicago Supporters**

..After the success of five years of hard work on the New York City African Burial Ground Project...it is time for us to get to know one another and to share information about the ideas generated here in Chicago relative to the question of cemeteries for enslaved Africans and their significance to African Americans and Africans in general. This note is to let you know that there are several organizations in the Chicago area that support the work of OPEI. In addition, there is interest in the findings of OPEI and its future efforts. Another purpose is to inform you of the Association of African Historians (AAH). For more information contact me at 312.268.7500 or by e-mail at MAAT622@aol.com.

Sincerely,
Anderson Thompson

**Children's Curiosity**

*[**Ed. note**: In the past year many school groups have either attended presentations at our site or have received presentations at their school. While the primary function of our public educators is to outline the historical significance of the African Burial Ground, occasionally the importance of becoming a role model for children becomes evident as stated in a recent letter sent by Kimberly of class 3J1 at P.S. 398 in Brooklyn who wrote to public educator Marie - Alice Devieux to ask " Is it easy to be what you are?" Other letters from class 3J1 show a high level of interest and concern for those buried at the site. Here are some examples]*

...Thank you for teaching us about bones and how the people had died, it was very interesting. Thank you for not yelling. I will love to be a scientist one day. Once more thank you for explaining disease.

Sincerely,
Vanessa Kelsey, Class 3J1

What you taught us was interesting and I want to thank you for coming and teaching us things from a long time ago, about 200 years ago. When did you and the other people find the bones? How long were the bones buried? Please answer these questions. I wrote notes to remember the things you taught us.

Your listener,
Tihana Gossett, Class 3J1

Thank you for coming to our class...I learned a lot like that person who died with a baby in her hand.

Sincerely your friend,
Richard Telfer, Class 3J1

**More News is Good News**

...I would like to thank you for the enlightening and stimulating lecture/slide presentation you made to my African American history class on Monday, November 11th. Students in the class learned a great deal from your comments and the newsletters you distributed. They were so impressed with the newsletters that I would like to request that you add me to your mailing list and forward about thirty copies of the upcoming issues of the newsletters as they are released....

Claude J. Mangum, Assoc.
Professor, Fordham Univ.

... My students have written some wonderful reports on their visit and some have even encouraged family members to visit. Would it be possible for you to send about 50 newsletters to me at the above address each semester, as I refer to the African Burial Ground extensively in my introductory physical and cultural anthropology classes. Again, thanks for your assistance.

Aurelia G. Perkins
Adjunct Faculty, Anthropology
Long Island University

*[**Ed note:** We appreciate the positive feedback concerning our presentations and newsletters. Look for our next issue of Update in February/March of 1997.]*

**OPEI welcomes letters but reserves the right to edit for length or clarity**

# NOTES FROM THE HOWARD UNIVERSITY BIOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY LABORATORY

## Howard University Report: Bridging Past and Future

***Pt. 2 of 2:***

***Compiled by Emilyn L. Brown***

*In the first part of this interview Howard staffers Dr. Michael Blakey, Alison Davis, Ena Fox, Keisha Hurst, Joseph Jones, Kenya Surya, and Shani Wright, discussed current laboratory findings and the outcome of a visit to New York's Museum of Natural History. The compilation of data from the Museum's skeletal population will be compared to the human remains recovered from the African Burial Ground. This comparative study will play an important part in future research. This second part of the interview discusses the scientific goals of the Project and offers meaningful commentary about the spiritual significance the African Burial Ground holds for staffers and the public at large.*

**Emilyn: Your research methods seem to be creating new standards for the future.**

**Dr. Blakey:** Just about everything that we do has that potential. The question is how successful are we going to be in our approach, number one, and number two, will others find our approach useful and take it up for their own use. Thus far, we are succeeding in just about everything that we've planned and have begun to do. Having access to African populations, African crania in fact, is very encouraging. We thought we would have to go to various museums in Europe and the African continent to get measurements from populations. We still may have to do that but we've gotten quite far along based on the populations at the American Museum of Natural History. We know, based on the work of Matthew George and Fatimah Jackson, that the DNA can be extracted and amplified from the bone. Of course we want to do more than morphometrical assessments, and studies of DNA are going to be very useful in determining the origins of the population especially mitochondrial DNA which will allow us to associate individuals with whole populations. This is a very special ability of mitochondrial DNA. We will be able to compare the results in those two areas of study (DNA and morphometrics) and understand the degree to which we are accurate. I would say with the DNA it should be possible to determine which individuals have a Y chromosome, which therefore allows us to determine the sex of sub-adults which is a very hard thing to do. So this new technology may allow us to determine sexes of sub-adults and we are also taking measurements for Susan Goode-Null who is working with us, testing one of the ideas that recently emerged for sexing sub-adults using measurements of the pelvis. As we test these new methods against each other we will have more fully characterized the African Burial Ground population — that is we'll know how many boys and girls there are, not just men and women — and we will also contribute to the development of science.

We've also found that the bone is sufficiently preserved to analyze its chemistry. It can tell us where the people have spent their lives and something about their diets during the eight years prior to their death. The results on the dental chemistry, the ability to assess dental chemistry, are being worked up now and I don't know what the final story is on that yet, but we will have to see whether we'll be able to assess where those who died as adults were actually raised as children. We're not quite sure about that yet, but I am very optimistic. As our research design indicated, we're going to use a combination of these: dental chemistry, DNA, morphometrics, cultural data and historical data to assess their origins. This is a much more sophisticated approach than has ever been attempted. These various data methods will allow us to verify the accuracy of each approach relative to every other approach. Maybe that's a bit of a lengthy explanation to your question, but the point is that we have a tremendous amount of data, a broad range of methodology, and we are using methods that have only recently become possible in some cases. That was what we planned to do, that is what we are doing, and so far so good.

**Emilyn:** What can you tell us about the future direction of the project?

**Dr. Blakey:** Let me say a couple of things about that. In the next phase there will be a number of specialized studies. We now need to do the DNA and the bone chemistry work that we said we were going to do if GSA will fund it. We're going to open the project up for researchers who had not otherwise been involved with us, to do special studies that can serve the project's needs along with their own. But the most intensive aspect of the coming phase is the archaeology and history, and with archaeological and historical data, we will know far more about how to interpret the skeletal remains than we know now.

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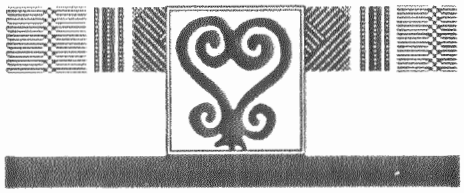
We really have one hand tied behind our backs right now as far as interpretation is concerned and over the next two years that other hand will become free and we'll be able to put both hands on the data and interpret the biology, archaeology and history.

For example, on the issue of origins, the historians will tell us where Africans were being traded from within Africa and to what ports they were taken to in Africa. Then they will trace their movements between those African ports and New York City during the relevant periods. Apparently there is already in existence a developing database that our historians can utilize. Dr. Linda Haywood here at Howard University has been very involved in working with that database. This work is extremely important for the archaeologists. African burial practices are extraordinarily diverse, and yet with a great deal of overlap between cultures. They cannot possibly examine all African burial practices and compare them with the African Burial Ground. They need to pin it down to the most likely candidates. Just as the geneticists need to pin down the most likely candidates, and that's where the historians come in.

If the geneticists come up with origins that are different from any of those pointed to by the historians, the historians then have a new lead as to where they might extend their research. This becomes a very dynamic discussion between disciplines. That's the way in which good science should be done, but this is all too seldom the case partly due to a lack of funding, sometimes a lack of vision and sometimes an unwillingness to collaborate with large groups of people, which is more difficult in some ways than doing it on your own. You have to share the work and the credit. By doing all of those things I feel that we will have a much more sophisticated view of the African Burial Ground, which is to say that the people buried there will then be known, understood, and will have identities consistent with that level of sophistication. There will be a richness, depth and a breadth to their identities that is largely a function of the depth, breadth and sophistication of the research.

**Emilyn: Then you could say that the scientific community is reconstructing history?**

**Dr. Blakey:** Yes, certainly but also the scientific community is part of a broader community and that does speak to a philosophical issue that has always been important to me; has always been at least a sub-text of the African Burial Ground scientific approach, which is that scientists cannot be isolated from the broader society. We are a part of that broader society and if we will but acknowledge that and take that seriously, then we will understand that we are responsible for the positions that we take analytically and we are accountable to other people and their needs.



I think the African Burial Ground, the scientific project, has benefitted from that realization and again, this is an area where we could make a contribution and maybe the area where we are already making a contribution. That is to say, as our work succeeds based on this engaged relationship with the community, others may see that this is the kind of approach that they too would like to take. Certainly there's been a great deal of growing interest within the anthropological community in the kind of approach that we've taken and many more people are interested in doing that. It's yet to be seen however, whether our colleagues are interested in this approach merely to take some of the heat off of them and smooth the way in negotiations with the descendant communities towards allowing them to do what it is they want to do anyway or whether they on the other hand, really understand their responsibility as a true obligation to work for the descendant community.

**Emilyn: Are the fractures that you're finding in this burial population still consistent with load bearing stress? Is Burial 25 the only individual that suffered violence?** *[Ed. note: Burial 25, is a woman who was shot with a musket ball and suffered multiple fractures]*

**Keisha:** To answer the first question I think the fractures are all consistent with load bearing stress.

**Shani:** I believe that the bullet entered the back of the body and rattled around, that's what happened. We did notice that her arm and was broken.

**Keisha:** There were also green stick fractures. We had to reconstruct her facial area around the nasal area and mouth.

**Shani:** This would be similar to someone being in a car accident and hitting their face against the windshield. Or it might be indicative of her falling over.

**Keisha:** Either falling or being butted in the face with the back of a rifle. Of course, we cannot guess what happened to all the individuals but we can, from training, place stories behind what happened to certain individuals. The fracture being indicative of her arm being twisted and with her being shot from behind, obviously she was resisting in some way.

**Dr. Blakey:** There are a number of fractures that yes, are associated with load bearing and work stress although they may be associated with some other kind of accident or trauma. We're still not at the point where we can definitely say what anything is. We're still not at

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a point where we can fully verify the way in which the fractures took place.

The arthritic changes we see in the neck are most consistent with, chronic heavy load bearing on the head. Many fractures of the spine that we're finding also are associated with load bearing although these too can result from injuries of other kinds.

**Emilyn: What is a green stick fracture?**

**Dr. Blakey:** That's a partial fracture that occurs in living bone and its manifestation in an archaeological skeleton is that it is beveled and also darkly stained, consistent with the fracture having occurred long before excavation. The beveled edge of the fracture tells us that this was a fracture that occurred in living bone. The darkened discoloration of that fracture also tells us that the fracture occurred long ago, before excavation and was therefore not the result of bone breakage during excavation.

**Emilyn: Meaning that the person was alive when the fracture occurred and that it didn't heal?**

**Dr. Blakey:** Right, that describes any perimortuary fracture. With many of the ones we're seeing there is a granular film of new bone over the beveled fracture. There is just a little new bone added which would mean that the person could have lived a few days, a few weeks and then died. Bone in a living person is constantly remodeling and ultimately that new bone would mend the entire fracture, that bone would be mended again in someone who was able to live for several weeks or months after it occurred. This would suggest then that they did not die as a result of the fracture. What we also see are fractures with no new bone growth which means that the person died almost instantly.

**Emilyn: Let's shift focus to another area of public interest. What has this project come to mean to you spiritually and emotionally?**

**Kenya:** Well for me, it's even more disturbing than I felt at the beginning. When you're working with them [the skeletal remains] you see how people have suffered. Seeing children that were obviously malnourished is very sad to me because if people were not making it to adulthood that signifies a tough life. You can also see children had to work hard. When I work with the burials, I can feel that there has been a lot of pain. Its obvious that they suffered, but I'm sure that they still managed to enjoy life, still managed to hold on to things. You can see with Mr. Sankofa how the symbolism remains, [**Ed. note:** *"Mr. Sankofa" refers to burial 101 whose coffin lid bore the image of a heart shaped design]*, or the woman buried with the beads, the child buried with the pendant...you can tell obviously that we didn't give up. It's also interesting that you see people with filed teeth and other markers that indicate they were born in Africa. That's very striking because you're seeing the transition from one place to another. You're seeing differences in the way people lived. I noticed looking at the Ashanti collection that the long bones, the muscle attachments weren't anything like what we see with the African Burial Ground population. I don't know if it's population differences or what, but I don't see in the muscle attachments, signs that they had to do the same kinds of things that people over here had to do. To me that's just really sad that people had to suffer in addition to their being in some place completely different. That really touches me.

**Ena:** Over the couple of years that I've worked on the project, I've seen the impact it's had on various communities who identify with what's going on here as an important spiritual connection. Its important to know this history and passing it on to young people; that is, the correct representations of history. Just the pride in this project, undertaken by a historically Black institution, with expert scholars, African Americans from many different disciplines participating and cooperating, I think is really, really important. It has given my work here a sense of purpose and just mentioning that I work for the project gets a strong reaction. Sometimes people will come in and they haven't made an appointment ahead of time. They just happen to be in town and they drop by. Although we can't give them a real tour, they seem satisfied just to have been here.

**Kenya:** Remember the South African group?

**Ena:** Yes! that was very, very moving!

**Kenya:** That was an example of how people are affected by this because they wanted to sing their national anthem. They stood in a circle and just sang.

**Alison:** It's just been everything to me for the last two years. Its my entire professional career, its what I've been doing since I got out of college. You would have to be dead spiritually not to feel something there, not every day, but often. It's more than just a science project.

**Keisha:** Everything! You know when I came in you were already discussing how so many people know about the burial ground and there are so many people who don't. In a way you do have to consider yourself, being part of this project, on a mission and I haven't had many jobs, but I know that, unlike any of the ones I've ever

***Cont. on page 14***

# African Burial Ground Update

❑ **OPEI salutes its Volunteers of the Year:**

☆☆ **Pat Willis and Kahlil Shaw** ☆☆

*"Trained African Burial Ground volunteers now total more than 100," states Dr. S.D. Wilson, OPEI Director. "We are very proud of the dedicated involvement of these individuals who work to keep the New York community, and the world informed on the status of this historic project. This year's Volunteers of the Year are outstanding crusaders for this cause."*

**Pat** describes herself as a healer, an outgrowth of her involvement in professional nursing. When asked how this ability was tied to her volunteerism at OPEI, she explained "The discovery of the African Burial Ground emanates healing. It encompasses information about an entire historical period of which we are mostly unaware. Having this knowledge is just the tip of the iceberg. This knowledge and what we do with it will serve to heal our pain and the pain of our ancestors. Being an intrinsic part of OPEI's volunteer group helps get the message out and getting the message out puts closure to their pain" (See also Community Voices).

**Kahlil is an enthusiastic supporter** and his presence at many of our events and symposiums helps to keep them running smoothly. An instructor in martial arts, he has a keen interest in African and African American history. "The information that can be obtained through OPEI is limitless," Kahlil explained. [It] also encourages you to conduct your own research project." As a result of his interests, Kahlil has written several articles for OPEI's volunteer newsletter **"The Cornerstone."**

Photo credit: S. Harper

**The area of the Foley Square Lab** where artifacts from the African Burial Ground are on display was recently refurbished to reflect its cultural and spiritual significance. Pictured above Public Educator Chadra Pittman discusses artifacts. **To arrange a lab tour please call 212.432.5707.**

Photo credit: S.D. Wilson

❑ **On October 5, 1996 the annual Afro-American Life and History Conference** in historic Charleston, South Carolina featured lectures about the African Burial Ground The conference began with a libation ceremony led by Ms. Zanabu Jones, conference organizer and spiritual leader. Included among the conference participant/presenters were renowned historian Dr. John Henrik Clarke, shown above with (r) Dr. Warren Perry, Associate Archaeologist for the African Burial Ground Project, (l) Dr. Michael Blakey, Scientific Project Director and Dr. Sherrill D. Wilson, OPEI Director (not pictured).

❑ **EVT Productions'** documentary on the African Burial Ground, "Then I'll Be Free to Travel Home," premiered at the Borough of Manhattan Community College on November 24, 1966. **For further information call 914.667.3614.**

**OPEI Mini-calendar of 1997 Events**

**January 25: Volunteer Training Symposium.**

**January 22: A special tribute to Martin Luther King** given by Dr. Sherrill D. Wilson ( at noon)

**March 12: A Woman's History Month** lecture by Dr. Wilson (at noon).

**March 22: Educators Symposium** including workshops, slide lectures, and reports from Howard University.

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**ARE YOU ON OUR MAILING LIST?**
Please submit names and/or corrections to OPEI,
6 World Trade Ctr., U.S. Custom House, Rm. 239
New York, New York 10048

# "Am I Not A Woman and A Sister?"
# New York African American Women & The American Abolitionist Movement

Sherrill D. Wilson, Ph.D

The efforts of 18th and early 19th century American Abolition membership organizations, did not as a rule include Africans nor women. African American and Euro-American women began to create their own antislavery societies beginning in 1833, in Boston and Philadelphia. In New York City the Ladies Antislavery Society was formed in 1835. The former all male, European descended societies made claim that their chief goal was the emancipation of enslaved Africans, however they also saw Euro-American women as the weaker and inferior sex, and Africans as the subservient and inferior race. African American women were viewed as having three strikes against them: race, sex and gender.

The relationship between African and Euro-American women was an uneasy alliance facing obstacles from within and without. The American feminist movement of the 1830s as Euro-American women redefined themselves as advocates for the enslaved African, the unfortunate poor, and lastly, themselves as members the society with voices, opinions and missions. Historians outlines this relationship as follows:

"Women began to make a public impact on American Society in the 19th century. During the 1830s and 1840s, antislavery agitation and other humanitarian movements enlisted devoted feminine support. White women operated on two pioneering fronts; black women necessarily operated on three. White women whatever the venture which inspired their effort were simultaneously involved as women. Black women, whenever involved in activities, were engaged not only as women but as black women" (Lowenberg & Bogin:1976)

**"O, ye daughters of Africa, awake! awake! arise!**
**No longer sleep nor slumber,**
**But distinguishing yourselves**
**Show forth to the world that ye are endowed with noble and exalted faculties,**
**— Maria Stewart, 1831**

"Historians of women and of the antebellum period generally agree that conscious feminist activity in the United States began in the late 1830s," writes Amy Swerdlow (1994). She, like many historians agrees with Aileen Kraditor's assessment that "the founders of the women's rights movement were all abolitionists, although not all abolitionists believed in equal rights for women" (1971).

Swerdlow in "Abolition's Conservative Sisters: The Ladies' New York City AntiSlavery Societies, 1834-1840" assesses the New York Euro-American faction as conservative, well to do women who felt it essential to act in keeping with societal views of traditional womanhood. Their advocacy for the unpopular antislavery movement is rationalized as moral - ly and religiously based.

In the 19th century free black women constituted more than half (approximately 52 percent), of the free African population in the United States. African American women were involved in meeting the numerous needs for the New York African American community obviously long before formal organizations were formed, (Wilson:1994). The African Dorcas Society established in 1827, is considered to be not the first New York African woman's society, but simply the earliest for which documentation has been preserved.

"In the most fundamental sense, African American women's participation in abolitionists efforts began with African girls and women who resisted their enslavement at every juncture. Their desire to be free fueled their participation in innumerable individual and group acts of resistance and rebellion throughout the colonial and antebellum eras (Hine:1993)." Hine continues to note motivation and inspiration for the highly personal involvement of African women in securing the freedom of themselves and their families.

"African-American women's involvement in abolition derived much of their inspiration and legitimacy from the self-help and self-involvement traditions of the Black Community.... Their organizations generally had three important priorities: service and charity to members and the adjoining Black community; individual and group intellectual development; and moral instruction appropriate for Christian women (Hine: 1993)."

African American women as organizers and leaders in the abolition movement began in "white" female antislavery societies, although these women often had gained leadership skills in supporting male organizations, first, and then forming auxiliary women's organizations to educate, and support New York Africans.

"The formation of women's antislavery societies in the 1830s brought black and white women together in an unprecedented fashion. Although white women's benevolent groups existed since the 1790s, almost none accepted African Americans as clients, let alone as members...When free black women organized independent associations, beginning in the 1820s, the realities of white exclusivity and desperate need among the black poor guaranteed that they would have neither clients, nor white members. Interracial antislavery societies represented a new departure in history of both black and white women's organizing" (Boylan: 1994).

African American abolitionist leaders without exception, had additional crucial roles in the community. Among the best known of these

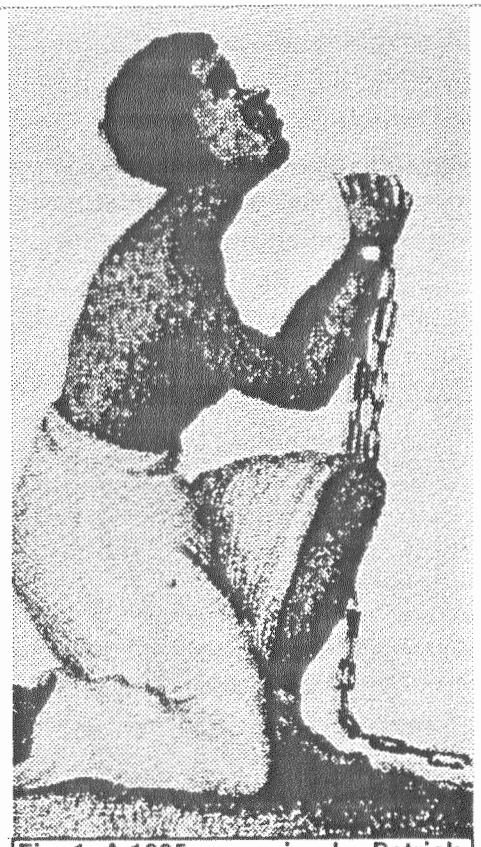
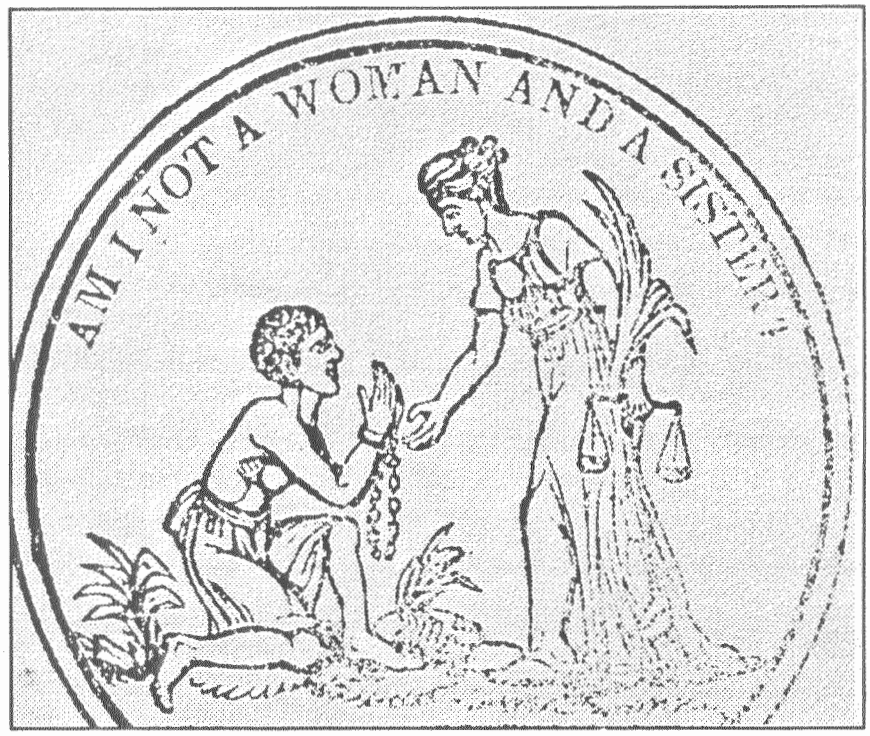


**Fig. 1: A 1835 engraving by Patrick Reason, "A Colored Young Man of the City of New York..." Reason was a former graduate of the African Free Schools. Below: A second version of this engraving appeared in 1838.**

leaders were: Harriet Tubman, nurse and folk healer, Sarah Redmond Parker (Falk: 1980), and Maria Stewart, Mary Shadd Cary, Margaretta and Charlotte Forten, Frances Harper, and Sarah Douglass (Hine: 1993). Maria Stewart, an orphan was the first woman of African descent to "hold a series of public lectures for a racially mixed audience of men and women" in 1831 (Hine: 1993). Stewart's address began:

> "O, ye daughters of Africa,
> awake! awake! arise!
> No longer sleep nor slumber,
> but distinguishing yourselves
> Show forth to the world that ye
> are endowed with noble and
> exalted faculties, (Stewart: 1831)

"Integrated abolitionist societies, however, did not eliminate demonstrations of racial bias. Many Euro-American abolitionists did not believe in racial equality or social integration...Many spoke to or about black abolitionists in a condescending or patronizing manner, willing to tolerate some African American participation in the movement



but demanding that Euro-American activists retain ultimate control (Hine:1993). Sarah Forten's response to this situation resulted in a poem for the 1837 Convention of American Women, it was entitled:

> "Our skins may differ, but from thee
> we claim / A sister's privilege and
> a sister's name."

The abolitionist emblem, Am I not a Woman and a Sister? which was adopted by, and used in many versions by American women abolitionists is one of the symbolic images which may be used to illustrate the strained and contradictory relations between 19th century African and Euro-American women (**See Fig. 1**).

The emblem used from 1832 on, was based on the 1787 male version of this emblem issued by the British based Committee to Abolish the Slave Trade. "Abolitionist leader and historian Thomas Clarkson described the antislavery emblem as "...An African...in chains in a supplicating posture, kneeling with one knee upon the ground, and with his hand lifted up to heaven, and round the seal...the following motto, as if he were uttering to himself- 'Am I not a Man and A Brother? (Yellin: 1989).

For 19th century African American women who were viewed as opposites to Euro-American women, occasionally exceptional individuals adamantly responded to that inquiry with a yea, the majority of the American society continued to view free women of color as not women, nor sisters.



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# COMMUNITY VOICES

*Compiled by Chadra D. Pittman*

*For this issue, OPEI posed the following question to individuals who have worked closely with the project over the past few years, as well as new supporters:* ***What are some effective ways in which OPEI can extend its educational outreach?***

**Lula Strickland-Abuwi**
**Journalist**

Over the years I think OPEI has done an excellent job. One idea I have is that young OPEI volunteers can mobilize other large groups of young people to help spread the word on the African Burial Ground. This could be done through youth organizations and clubs, their specific media, youth entertainment such as rap/hip-hop forums and varied educational outlets, including sororities and fraternities. Let youth educate youth on their own turf.

**Professor A.J. Williams-Myers**
**African American Studies, S.U.N.Y. at New Paltz**

What comes to mind quickly would be seminars for elementary and middle school teachers, perhaps keeping in mind that high school teachers should be included too since they touch the lives of so many of our young people. This would create continuity in terms of what OPEI is doing and create a stronger foundation for young people and no doubt for those who come behind them as they move through the system, so that we are building a continuity that is necessary to keep the light aglow; an idea that needs to light the hearts of many others in the community.

**Pat Willis**
**OPEI Volunteer**

Education is the key. We need to get out into the community more often and on a regular basis with a regular schedule to speak to as many groups as we possibly can or as would have us. We should start with the public schools, perhaps we need to speak to Rudy Crew to see whether or not we could develop a scheduling plan to speak in the public schools. Thereafter we should approach various civic and young adult groups such as 100 Black Men and 100 Black Women, the churches and particularly the Black churches and colleges and hospitals and medical groups to get the message out. What I'm advocating is a very big job and OPEI is a very small group that is working to keep the core situation going. Perhaps we need to solicit help from sources like those above.

**Michael Edwards**
**Administrator, College of New Rochelle**

One important way to share information about the African Burial Ground is to prepare a 15 or 20 minute video segment that would provide an overview of the struggle to save the African Burial Ground. A lot of people across the country still don't know all the details or what the status of the project is. A video could be be used by public access cable channels as a regular feature, particularly during Black History Month. It could be updated as new things develop. It would be a way to guarantee that you reach just as many people as you do when you hold public presentations. You may even reach more because people watch cable at night and on the weekend. Some public access networks like BCAT in Brooklyn, offer workshops on how to produce videos and incorporate them into public access programming.

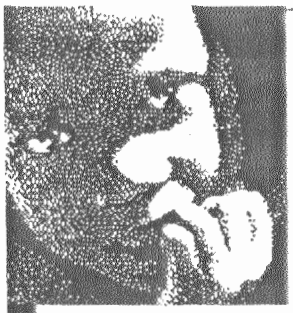
**Clifford B. Simmons, Executive Director**
**Blue Nile Passage Inc. Abysinnian Church**

Community groups such as the Blue Nile Passage have their own educational components, whether its in a after-school setting or a Saturday program, and these groups like The Valley, The Door, Boys and Girls Harbor and the Blue Nile Passage Inc. are grass roots organizations who are connected to the community, and connected specifically to the youth in our community. Maybe if you were in closer contact with some of these groups and their executive directors, like you are with ours, it would help. These groups are like tentacles into the community and those are the minds that should really be gathering the knowledge that is coming from your organization. Other groups such as CEMOTAP, the Board For The Education Of People Of African Ancestry are important too. Become part of the Schomburg lecture series on Thursday nights. The CUNY system, and especially the heads of Africana/Black Studies Departments should be talked to and maybe you could draft curriculum that could be used by those institutions. WLIB AND WBAI are always good sources to use as well.

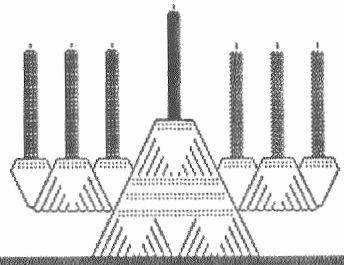
## BEST WISHES FOR THE NEW YEAR!
## FROM THE DIRECTOR AND STAFF OF O.P.E.I.

Photo credit: Doville Nelson

Center/Front: OPEI Director Dr. Sherrill D. Wilson. 2nd Row (l to r): Emilyn L. Brown, Historical Researcher, Deborah A. Wright, Marie-Alice Devieux, Public Educators. 3rd Row (l): Donna Harden Cole, Public Educator (r) Tamara R. Jubilee, Historical Researcher. Back Row: Okomfo Ama Badu Boakyewa and Chadra D. Pittman, Public Educators, Steve Harper, Office Manager; Deinabo George, Public Educator.

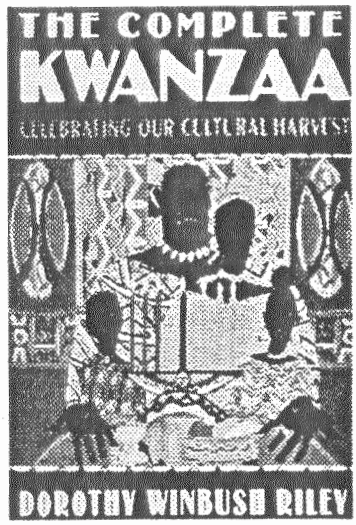


# A HOLIDAY BOOK LIST



COMPILED BY
SHERRILL D. WILSON, PH.D.






As the winter holidays are upon us, a growing number of African Americans are beginning to examine and celebrate Kwanzaa. Kwanzaa is an original African American holiday that draws upon the cultural traditions of more than 18 million people from Africa and the African diaspora. Some celebrate Kwanzaa instead of Christmas. Many celebrate both Kwanzaa and Christmas. Kwanzaa is celebrated seven days, from December 26 through January 1.

Each of the seven days is dedicated to the Nguzo Saba or Seven Principles. These principles are: Umoja-Unity, Kujichagulia-Self Determination, Ujima-Collective Work and Responsibility, Ujamaa-Cooperative Economics, Nia-Purpose, Kuumba-Creativity, and Imani-Faith. While Kwanzaa is not celebrated in Africa, it was created in 1996 by Dr. Maulana Karenga based on African customs and traditions around the harvest of crops. In Swahili Kwanzaa, literally means "first fruits of the harvest."

Books, and other cultural paraphernalia are emerging and available to assist those exploring and learning about this African American celebratory occasion. Three of the many books available are: Jessica Harris' A KWANZAA KEEPSAKE: Celebrating The Holiday with New Traditions and Feasts, Dorothy Winbush Riley's THE COMPLETE KWANZAA: Celebrating Our Cultural Harvest and MERRY CHRISTMAS BABY: A Christmas and Kwanzaa Treasury by Paula Woods and Felix Liddell.

**Kwanzaa: An Everyday Resource & Instructional Guide by David Anderson/SANKOFA NY.: Thomas Gumbs Pub., 1993**

**Celebrate: Traditional Ethnic Entertaining In America by Hilary Davis NY: Crescent Books, 1992**

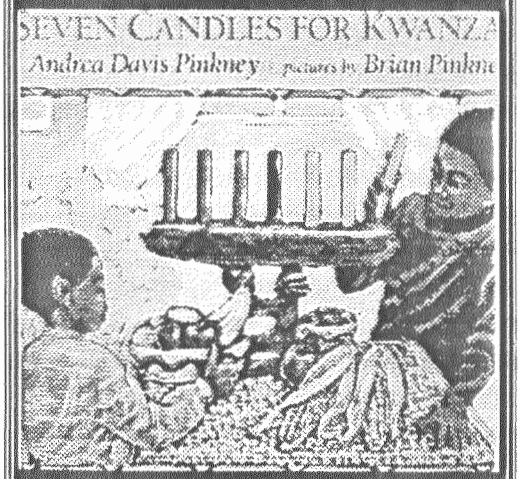
**Kwanzaa: Origin, Concepts, Practice by Dr. Maulana Karenga: Kawaida Publications, 1977**

**The Seven Days of Kwanzaa: How to Celebrate Them by Angela Shelf Medearis. NY: Scholastic Inc. 1994**

**The Complete Kwanzaa: Celebrating Our Cultural Harvest by Dorothy Winbush Riley. NY: Harper Collins, 1995**

**A Kwanzaa Fable by Eric Copage. NY: Wm. Morrow Co. 1995.**

**And For Children....**




**Seven Candles for Kwanzaa by Andrea Davis Pinkney, pictures by Brian Pinkney. NY.: Dial Book for Young Readers, 1993**

**The Children's Book of Kwanzaa by Delores Johnson. NY: Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 1996.**

**Kwanzaa Fun by Linda Robertson and Julia Pearson. NY: Larousse Kingfisher Chamber Inc. 1996**

Food historian, Jessica Harris asserts that there are many ways to celebrate this period of contemplation and self affirmation, for individuals, families and communities. She maintains that "I realize that I have been celebrating it (Kwanzaa) all of my adult life in my own personal way." A KWANZAA KEEPSAKE offers historical background on the holiday and discusses some of the many ways to celebrate it. Harris supplies menus and recipes for every day of the celebration as well as the sixth day, KARAMU or Healing feast. Additionally this volume suggests personal and family projects for each day meant to "bring families and friends together in productive ways."

THE COMPLETE KWANZAA: Celebrating Our Cultural Harvest is in many ways the most extensive work of it's kind. Author, and editor, Dorothy Winbush Riley asserts the period from December 26 through January 1 has taken on new meaning for many African Americans since the creation and celebration of Kwanzaa by Dr. Karenga, thirty years ago. Riley's work provides inspirational poetry, quotations, folktales, proverbs, parables and profiles of prominent African American historical figures and contemporaries.

Riley suggests that Kwanzaa is holistic in nature, meant to influence us year around. She notes: "For African Americans to harvest success during the Kwanzaa celebration, we must begin preparations on January 2 of each year....Applying the values of Kwanzaa with our innate spiritual powers produces prosperity".

Paula Woods and Felix H. Liddell's MERRY CHRISTMAS BABY: A Christmas and Kwanzaa Treasury will indeed become a notable keepsake to commemorate the season. This volume draws upon the writings of many who have influenced us all, e.g. Frances E.W. Harper, W.E.B. Dubois, Angelina Grimke, Langston Hughes, Dr. Martin Luther King, Nikki Giovanni and others throughout many years. The editors assert that for many Christmas has been lost in the commercialism of the shopping season, and for African Americans the images of traditional Euro-American Christmas, i.e. White Christmas, leaves many people of African descent feeling excluded from the "spirit of the holiday".

Woods and Liddell maintain however, that African Americans have long traditions of celebrating both Christmas and Kwanzaa in meaningful ways. MERRY CHRISTMAS BABY, brings together the voices and images of this long celebratory tradition. The volume is loaded with wonderful color reproductions of noted African American artists, prayers, poems and recipes that commemorate the Christmas and Kwanzaa celebrations of young and old.

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*Howard University Report*
*Continued from page 5*

had, where you can leave issues at work, this project is part of me and I take it wherever I go. I take it home with me. In my personal life the work place follows me wherever I go. You know I talk about this project in the classroom and I do think I consider myself, in a way, a missionary I guess, trying to be a public educator about what goes on in the project and to encourage people to come and witness what is going on here. Just the hands on experience of working with the skeletons on the project is emotional in the sense that you can feel and you can see exactly what kind of pain they had to endure and how they suffered in order to live and for things to be the way they are today.

That's the emotional aspect, and spiritually, just walking in I think you can feel the presence of or warmth of the ancestors protecting, you and I mean its overwhelming! Its also kind of hard to explain, but if you've been on the project for almost three years like myself, I think it just becomes a part of your life and I think even come Friday, when its over, it will always be a part of my life. Its been a great experience, its been an honor to be a part of it and there's just nothing else like it.

**Shani:** For me, I think even before I began I was excited about it and tried any means to get on the project. Before I came on I had a certain expectation. I mean I had never worked with human remains but I kind of had an idea of what it would be like. It was far different once I began working on the project. I felt more of a connection. I didn't know that Dr. Blakey was going to go as extensively into the project as far as determining where these individuals were from. What I knew about archaeology was that you determine if they're white or black, how they died, what they ate, how they lived that kind of thing, but not where they were from, or what kind of stress they encountered in their lifetime. It was also how they buried their dead. When you see how they buried them with shroud pins, wrapping them in shrouds, there was a love there that I didn't realize.

So I know like Keisha, I feel privileged to have worked on this project and I will probably keep it, definitely keep it with me forever. I do feel the connection and it makes you think, these were my ancestors and these people were actually from the Continent. It changed my whole perception of "slave" because you learn in school that Africans were slaves not Africans and that whole concept changed for me when I started working on the project. They were humans, Africans who were enslaved.

**Emilyn: Will you play a continuing role in relation to the African Burial Ground?**

**Kenya:** My parents were part of an organization that founded a school in New Jersey called the African Peoples Action School and for their 20th anniversary dinner, they asked me to speak about the project...They want to have a continued interaction with it and I think things like that could definitely have impact. I think the interest will continue long after the bones are put back in the ground.

**Ena:** I've talked to a number of people...and a couple of those people knew about it and they liked how we use this as a resource. There are so many things, from science disciplines to culture and social history, so many things that can be drawn out of this. I've also talked to people, some of who had heard about it but really didn't have information, and these were educators. When we talk about the emotional and spiritual part of this, which is kind of an outgrowth of our work here, I do feel, among those of us who have worked together on the project, that it has been a community here. We come from different backgrounds and experiences but we share a common commitment in doing this work, so certainly for me there is an emotional and spiritual aspect of being here.

**Kenya:** This is the kind of project that makes people feel very close. We've had people come in for tours and they leave us telephone numbers. One man brought me two books and said I just wanted to give you this, thank you for the tour. It just seems to me that things here are very closely knit; people can be themselves, people can be relaxed because we're all united in a purpose. Not just within the lab, not just within Howard, but within the community. People really bond over this and I think that's a good thing because it's not something that happens a lot.

**Joseph:** The timing of the project [was important], coming along at a point when I'm in college; a point where you go through a lot of changes in terms of reevaluating things. My father is a Baptist minister, and I was raised in the southern Baptist tradition, so to come here and to see a lot of different religions and be open to them is, not necessarily difficult, but challenging. The project has really helped me to open my eyes. I thought I already had an appreciation for different personalities, cultures and things like that, but this project really forces you, if you're going to work on ancestral populations, to open yourself up to more things spiritually. The general feeling is that this is something like a case that was never closed. We have to go back and give voice to the ancestors so that we can know where we're going.

**Dr. Blakey:** At this point I'd say that the individuals who we see here everyday, the skeletons that we examine, are full of powerful information that make the lives of my ancestors more real to me. The evidence of their hardships and high mortality however, while somewhat stronger than I expected, is not inconsistent with what I expected.

I've studied many skeletal populations. There are 1100 ancestors whose material remains surround us in this office, with whom we spend every day. [***Ed. note:*** *The combined skeletal populations comprising the Cobb Collection and the African Burial Ground].* So I would have to say that while this work is very meaningful to me, that aspect of the work has not been the most powerful.

The most powerful thing for me has been the way in which living people have come to relate to this project. The living people who come to this laboratory and ask questions or call on the telephone or have libation ceremonies, who bring their children, their elders, who feel an emotional connection, a spiritual connection toward the remains and toward the work that we're doing. This is what is so unexpected in terms of magnitude. I always thought that there would be interest in what we're doing. I felt that public engagement would foster that interest. I could not have imagined the extent of interest and the depth of concern and the pride that is taken by our laboratory staff and everyone, or at least most of those, who come to visit us in what we are doing and in the fact that we are doing it.

These skeletons constitute a bridge and whenever people meet over these skeletons a bridge is erected between them, the ancestors, and the people who work here. There are other bridges that are erected when people meet, examine and think about these remains. There are bridges between various communities in New York and the struggle over this burial ground, the struggle to secure it. It has united and built bridges between people of very different political tendencies. It has established a bridge between African Americans and their African past and also between African Americans and Africans in the present who can look at these remains and know that we are kin. We have the same ancestors and here they are and they are telling us through science that they are ours, both of ours, all of ours.

When I made my presentation at the U.N. you could see it in the faces of the African delegates. The photographs and discussions of these ancestors and the way in which our community fought for them had just built a bridge. There's an African cemetery in North America. The African Americans and we, they must have thought, are descended from those people we're looking at. They care about their ancestors and revere them and we care about our ancestors and they are coming to us and we must respond. And there was a sense then, as with the Ghanaian delegation, as with the African American historians and others who come to this laboratory, that we are taking our history into our own hands.

Many people are thinking, in their own way, from their own point of view, within the African diaspora, that this is a beginning of something. This is what they said at the U.N. This is what the royal delegation from Ghana has said. This is what African American scholars have said. This is what African American Akan and Yoruba spiritual leaders have said. We don't know where it will end, but it is exciting.

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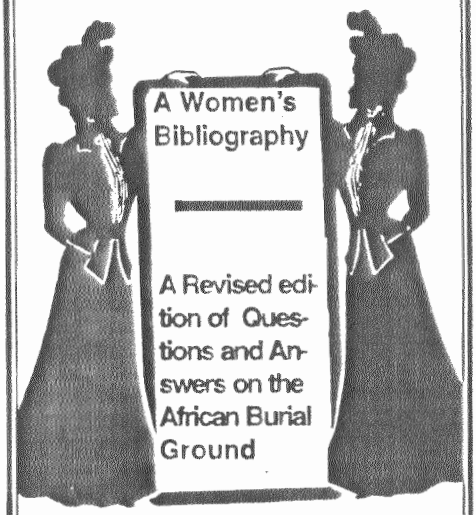
## Coming In 1997




## In The Next Issue of Update:

- **Peggy King-Jorde: Memorialization Plans for the African Burial Ground Site**
- **Laws Regulating Preservation of Historical Burial Grounds**
- **An Update on the Artifacts recovered from the African Burial Ground**

ADDRESS